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New York

President:	Ms. Čolaković	(Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Members:	Brazil	Mr. Rizzo
	China	Mr. Huang Hongjiang
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Ms. Legendre
	Gabon	Mrs. Ntyam-Ehya
	Germany	Mr. Eick
	India	Mr. Gupta
	Lebanon	Mr. Ramadan
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Portugal	Mr. Vaz Patto
	Russian Federation	Mr. Listov
	South Africa	Mr. Crowley
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Afshar
	United States of America	Ms. Masilko

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 2.40 p.m.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Security Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Richard Falk, recently voiced his concern over the murder of four Palestinian citizens by the Israeli Defense Forces in the West Bank and the demolition of the historic Hotel Shepherd in the centre of Jerusalem to make way for an Israeli settlement. The West Bank Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Barbara Shenstone, indicated that the demolitions of dwellings of Palestinian citizens occupied since prior to 1948 are reprehensible acts of devastating effect and violate Israeli obligations pursuant to international law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These facts continue to occur without this body adopting efficient measures to avoid such excesses. Therefore, it is imperative to reiterate that all activities connected with the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are illegal and constitute a major obstacle to the achievement of peace in the region.

These and other reprehensible actions repeatedly carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, which are aimed at changing the demographic composition, character and status of Palestinian territories, in clear violation of international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of this body and of the United Nations, require the international community to demand the immediate cessation of such illegal activities.

Against this backdrop, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela co-sponsors and therefore firmly supports the draft resolution urging Israel to cease the construction of settlements. The United Nations must condemn in the firmest possible manner these repeated violations of international law carried out by the State of Israel and adopt practical and effective measures to prevent them, at the risk of its historic relevance.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela welcomes the increasing number of countries, in particular those of Latin America and the Caribbean, that have joined the dozens of countries throughout the world recognizing Palestine as a free and independent State. The delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to recall the importance of ensuring the implementation of all Security Council and other United Nations resolutions promoting a peaceful solution that will lead to the establishment of two States. The Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map are equally relevant proposals that urge direct negotiations between the parties so that the State of Israel and the State of Palestine can live side by side within secure and recognized borders.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reaffirms the need to implement the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War in the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and the other Arab territories occupied since 1967.

Our country emphasizes the importance of the annual international United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, to be held on 7 and 8 February in Cairo on the theme "The urgency of addressing the plight of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention facilities". This praiseworthy initiative, supported by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will offer the opportunity to address the repeated violations of human rights suffered by hundreds of men and women who heroically and with dignity have fought for the just, legal and heroic cause of their people.

We cannot fail to mention the delicate humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The daily suffering of Palestinians in this territory requires us to demand once again the immediate lifting of the merciless blockade imposed by the Government of the State of Israel.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela once again calls on the State of Israel to respect the sovereignty of Lebanon so that situations such those of July 2006 may avoid recurrence. In that respect, efforts to promote direct negotiations between the parties must be encouraged, pursuant to resolution 1701 (2006).

All illegal actions aimed at violating the territorial area of the occupied Syrian Golan are also an

impediment to comprehensive peace in the region. Hence, Member States must address the need for Israel to withdraw pursuant to the demands of resolution 498 (1981). Moreover, resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) must be implemented in order to preserve the territorial integrity of Syria and thereby contribute to the peace that is so sorely needed throughout the region.

I would conclude by stating that cruelty, injustice and unfairness throughout the world can constitute major obstacles to the implementation of the provisions of international law. That is why we once again call on the State of Israel to comply with the resolutions adopted by the United Nations on the Middle East and the question of Palestine. We very much hope that today's debate of the Security Council will contribute to achieving the longed-for peace in that region of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Let me begin by congratulating you, Madame President, on Bosnia and Herzegovina's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and by extending the appreciation of my delegation to you and the members of the Council for convening this open debate on such an important issue.

My delegation joins others in congratulating the five new members of the Council — Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa — and in wishing them a very productive and successful tenure in the Council. We would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement of the Organization of Islamic Conference to be delivered by the representative of Tajikistan.

In the past few weeks, the news emanating from the region has been of grave concern. The acceleration of settlement construction and expansion in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, epitomizes this harrowing trend. The situation was made even worse by the latest military incursion conducted by Israel a few days ago. The international community is very aware of the ultimate objective of these settlement policies and measures. They are clearly aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Israel is violating international law and the United Nations Charter.

The illegal Israeli settlements undermine all efforts to restart peace talks between Palestine and Israel, jeopardizing the vision of a two-State solution and complicating the conflict in the region. We therefore attach primary importance to the role of the Security Council in responding to the settlement issue as it did back in 1980, when it adopted resolution 465 (1980). The Council must regain its role in solving this very important issue, as mandated by the United Nations Charter.

It is in this context that Indonesia is co-sponsoring the draft resolution before the Council on the illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We hope that this new resolution will reverse the inactivity of the Security Council when it comes to matters relating to the suffering of the Palestinian people. The Council must and indeed can exert a positive influence on the Middle East peace process.

At this stage, however, it is hard to imagine that peace can be victorious in the Middle East through a one-time lofty solution. We can always hope for the kind of effort made at Oslo or Madrid or Annapolis, but for the time being we must appreciate positive developments on any scale that keep the peace process in motion. Indonesia therefore supports the current surge in diplomacy aimed at relaunching negotiations and jump-starting a comprehensive peace process, including the ongoing efforts of the United States. We also recognize the role of the Quartet in promoting solutions to the conflict in the Middle East. And, not least, we have been persistent in recognizing the contribution of countries in the region and of the League of Arab States to the Middle East peace process, including through the Arab Peace Initiative.

It is our view that the peace process and the peace settlement must be aligned. One cannot envisage a peace settlement forced under the threat of the barrel of a gun. That would produce only a short-lived settlement, if not a hazardous one. Nor can one imagine a peace process that lacks the legitimacy conferred by the main parties and the international community.

For far too long the Middle East conflict has tarnished the efforts of our era to create a peaceful and liveable region. The need to find a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the conflict is absolutely critical. The Government of Indonesia is committed to helping to achieve an end to the protracted and bitter conflict that has been wearing on the parties of the region for far too long. Our commitment to and support for the Palestinian cause is total and unwavering. Our commitment to an independent, viable and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with its neighbours, is absolute.

Let me conclude by expressing our fervent hope, which, I believe, is also shared by many here and outside this Chamber. The Palestinian comprehensive plan was launched in August 2009 in preparation for independence within a 24-month period. We hope that 2011 will be the year that history will record as seeing the victory of reason over fear, the victory of humanity over cruelty; the year enabling us to liberate the people of Palestine and to bestow peace and prosperity on them, the year to see two countries living side by side, charting a new phase in their bilateral relationship. The Security Council owes the international community and those two peoples such a desirable and dignified outcome.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Errázuriz (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is my honour to address the Security Council today in the debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I thank the presidency for convening an open debate on this matter, which has been the focus of attention and concern on the part of the international community for decades. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing.

Chile associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

My country has consistently supported the right of the Palestinian people to form an independent State coexisting in peace with the State of Israel. Similarly, we have fully supported the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders. In order to achieve those aims, the Government of Chile considers imperative and resolutely supports the relaunching of the negotiation process between the two parties, with the support of the international community, in order to achieve a comprehensive, definitive and satisfactory peace agreement in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations.

The continuation of the Israeli Government's policy of settlement construction is a serious obstacle to this process, and we call for its immediate suspension, as stated in the draft resolution submitted to the Council, of which my delegation is a sponsor.

The Government of Chile, on the seventh of this month, recognized the existence of Palestine as a free, independent and sovereign State. In that recognition, the Government of Chile made particular mention of the Jewish and Palestinian communities in Chile because of their valuable support for the country's social, cultural, political and economic development over many decades, and for their full integration into our society. Their fraternal coexistence has been a clear example of good relations, which we hope will serve as an inspiration to the States of Israel and Palestine, a point that I reiterate that today in this Chamber.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Núñez Mosquera (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba supports the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

It is regrettable that the situation in the region, particularly the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, is continuing without progress being made. The region is still marked by instability and insecurity. The situation in the Gaza Strip is unsustainable. The blockade of the Strip — the imposition by Israel of impediments and restrictions on the freedom of movement and access to both persons and goods, including humanitarian and medical supplies — has made the recovery and reconstruction of the area practically impossible, a situation that has further affected the already precarious living standards of the population.

The international community cannot remain indifferent. All possible practical measures must be taken to ensure that Israel ends those policies, which are carried out deliberately and in violation of international laws. Such policies only increase the suffering and tensions of the Palestinian people. Cuba

reiterates its demand that Israel immediately, unconditionally and fully lift the cruel and illegal blockade in Gaza and allow the free movement of supplies to and from the Gaza Strip, as well as permanent humanitarian access to it.

Cuba condemns the settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, which are continuing despite the calls by the international community for an immediate halt to them. Recently, the Government of Israel, in flagrant violation of the norms of international law, destroyed the historic Shepherd Hotel, located in the occupied territory of East Jerusalem, to establish a new Israeli settlement. Israel also announced that in 2012 it will allocate $500 million for subsidies for settlement activities.

At the end of 2009, more than 3,700 dwellings were being built and more than 200 Palestinian dwellings were demolished to make way for those illegal activities. Cuba demands an immediate halt to the demolition of Palestinian dwellings, the construction of the wall and the eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, as well as other acts of provocation and illegal aggression perpetrated by the extremist settlers against the Palestinian population and the holy sites. These measures and policies perpetuated by Israel are serious and flagrant violations of international law, the United Nations Charter, many resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004.

The Security Council cannot remain indifferent to these facts. Its silence over the past two years on this matter has been used by Israel to pursue its demolitions and construction of settlements. Direct conversations between Israel and Palestine, upon which the international community pinned certain hopes, lasted for less than a month, due to Israel's decision to continue its settlement activities and to end the brief moratorium thereon.

The widespread physical, economic and social devastation caused by the illegal and destructive practice of settlements has been the main obstacle to achieving a peace agreement. In practical terms, the settlement policy prevents the creation of a Palestinian State on the basis of the existing 1967 borders, and thus the possibility of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a just manner.

Cuba reaffirms that any measure or action that Israel has taken or will take to change the legal, physical and demographic situation and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, or to exercise jurisdiction and administration in that territory is null and void and has no legal effect. We also reaffirm that all such measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, are violations of international law and agreements, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and represent a defiance of the international community. Cuba demands Israel's full withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Israel cannot be allowed to continue to commit serious and flagrant violations of international law with impunity. The Security Council must shoulder its responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security in the region and, in particular, for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Palestinian people and its leaders have agreed to and are working assiduously for a two-State solution. However, Israel thus far has not proved to be a serious interlocutor in the peace process. The international community must assume its responsibility for the Palestinian question and find a solution that allows the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination. In this connection, it is imperative that a peace agreement be achieved this year, pursuant to relevant resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. The growing international recognition of the Palestinian State that we have seen in recent weeks in Latin America and the Caribbean should give momentum towards achieving this objective.

Cuba once again reiterates its position in favour of a fair and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East that will put an end to the occupation of all the Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and guarantee the exercise of self-determination of the Palestinian people by means of the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Mugoya (Uganda): I thank you, Madame President, for organizing today's open debate on the

situation in the Middle East. We thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for his statement.

We welcomed the holding of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas in Washington, D.C., Sharm el-Sheikh and Jerusalem, with a renewed sense of optimism. Both parties committed themselves to negotiating in good faith a framework agreement that would lay the foundation for a final peace treaty. The expectation of the international community was that this momentum would be sustained towards the long-awaited creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel. Uganda is convinced that there is no viable alternative to a negotiated solution and that comprehensive and durable peace lies in a two-State solution.

We urge Israelis and Palestinians alike to summon the necessary courage to engage without delay in substantive negotiations on all core issues, including security, borders, settlements, refugees and Jerusalem. In this regard, we commend the efforts undertaken by the international community and regional partners in facilitating negotiations. There is no doubt that the negotiation process will require courageous decisions and concessions by both parties.

My delegation is deeply concerned about the recent developments that led to the stalling of direct talks. The continued settlement activity of Israel is a recipe for conflict. In this regard, the recent demolition of the Shepherd Hotel and the planned construction of a new settlement are not conducive to negotiations. In our view, such actions constitute an obstacle to peace. We reiterate our call upon Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth.

Uganda salutes the Palestinian Authority, under the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, for the significant accomplishments towards fulfilling its obligations under the Road Map, particularly in the security sector, institution-building and economic development.

We are also concerned over the situation in Gaza. While we welcome the easing of the blockade, it is evident that it continues to hamper humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts in that area. We therefore call for Israel's complete lifting of the blockade. It is essential that both parties exercise maximum restraint and adhere to the ceasefire, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009) and other relevant resolutions.

On the subject of Lebanon, we are concerned about the continued violations of resolution 1701 (2006), and reiterate our call on all parties to fully implement that resolution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Kodama (Japan): I thank you very much, Madame President, for giving us the opportunity to address the situation in the Middle East. I would like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Ambassador Mansour, for his statement this morning.

Japan hopes that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace will be realized at the earliest date possible. In this context, Japan strongly supports a two-State solution and remains convinced that the only way to achieve durable peace is to achieve the two-State solution through sincere negotiations.

Gravely concerned by the current impasse in the peace process, we strongly encourage both parties to restart direct negotiations. We also believe that there is lack of mutual trust that is preventing this. We call on both sides to engage the United States and the international community and to take steps that will create an environment conducive to renewing direct negotiations.

The two parties must abide by their obligations under previous agreements, most importantly the Road Map. We call on Israel, as we have on so many occasions, to freeze its settlement activities in the West Bank, which includes East Jerusalem. In that connection, Japan condemns the demolishing of a part of Shepherd Hotel in East Jerusalem with a view to constructing new housing units for Jewish people. Japan does not recognize any unilateral measures that prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations.

At the same time, we call upon the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to improve security and fulfill its commitment to cease violence and work against incitement. We strongly condemn the rocket attacks launched into Israel and call on those responsible to immediately stop.

Japan strongly supports and will continue to provide assistance to the State-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority.

On the Gaza strip, the measures taken by Israel to ease the blockade are a positive step, but Japan remains concerned about the humanitarian situation. Japan stresses the importance of further easing the blockade while preventing the inflow of weapons into the Gaza Strip. Japan welcomes Israel's easing of restrictions on movement and access in the West Bank, which has contributed to the development of the Palestinian economy, and hopes that Israel will further ease such restrictions.

We call on both parties to make the difficult decisions to advance peace. Japan will continue its efforts to realize a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Allow me to say a few words on Lebanon. We are concerned about the situation in Lebanon, where a number of Cabinet members under Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced their resignation last week. We reaffirm our support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon and for the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. We are closely following the developments in Lebanon and support the efforts of President Michel Sleiman for the early establishment of a new Government and the maintenance of democratic institutions.

We support the Special Tribunal for Lebanon — an independent and international judicial organization whose work will enhance the rule of law. The Tribunal should continue to carry out its mandate without any interference, which will contribute to ending impunity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): Let me first congratulate Bosnia and Herzegovina for assuming the presidency of the Security Council.

The Council is once again deliberating on the situation in the Middle East, and once again the outlook is bleak. We are not even remotely close to a negotiated comprehensive settlement, and recent developments in various parts of the region are fuelling uncertainty and instability. The continuing state of flux is not at all conducive to addressing the many intertwined issues facing us in the Middle East. That is why it is crucial to actively and aggressively engage with all actors with a view to putting the relevant process back on track.

Turkey continues to believe that there is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution. The parameters are well known and remain on the table. We reject violence of any kind perpetrated by any party. We also recognize that an impasse in which one side continuously undermines any and all efforts at even direct talks is not tenable.

At the moment, on the Israeli-Palestinian track there are ongoing talks on whether there can be talks towards addressing core issues. However, slowly but surely, and in blatant disregard for international law or morality, Israel is imposing its will on the Palestinians, through accelerated and aggressive settlement activity, tightening measures of occupation, demolitions and evictions.

The latest developments in East Jerusalem are deplorable. How can the Palestinian side be expected to negotiate in good faith while Israel continues to advocate and implement such unilateral policies? That is the major dilemma at the moment, and that is why it is high time for the Security Council to make a strong statement on such unilateral Israeli practices. The Council must not shy away from that responsibility.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian side cannot be expected to remain a prisoner of Israel's will forever. Indeed, with the ongoing help of the international community, the Palestinians are successfully building their national institutions, and at the current pace and performance they are well positioned for the establishment of their State at any point in the near future. That process cannot be reversed, as evidenced by the recent increase in the number of States that recognize Palestine. Based on the will of the international community, that process will ultimately culminate in the creation of the State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders.

On the other hand, it has been two years since Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) was adopted. The sad truth is that since then there has been no significant change on the ground. Despite all the public diplomacy to the contrary, the circumstances of the 1.5 million prisoners in Gaza remain appalling. An unjust, inhumane and unlawful blockade continues to be imposed from land and sea. Homes, schools and basic infrastructure cannot be built. Markets are full of

goods no one can afford. Indeed, resolution 1860 (2009), which called for the unimpeded provision of humanitarian aid and the elevation of the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza, has become, for all intents and purposes, meaningless. The plight of the Palestinians of Gaza is an embarrassment for the international community.

Meanwhile, an international humanitarian aid convoy attempting to deliver much-needed material to Gaza was attacked by Israel in international waters more than six months ago. A panel of inquiry was established to investigate that incident, with the participation of Israel. However, it is January 2011, and Israel has yet to submit its report.

Turkey is concerned about the recent turn of events in Lebanon. We fully support Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. The democratic process, the rule of law and constitutional order must not be undermined. Achieving lasting national reconciliation is in the interest of all Lebanese people and factions. Turkey will continue to actively promote and support all efforts to foster peaceful political dialogue in Lebanon and the region.

The President: I call next on the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to express my delegation's appreciation to you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate under the frustrating and precarious circumstances that prevail in the occupied Palestinian territories, which are felt in the whole region, especially under the daily practices of the Israeli Government and its evasion of negotiations. We also wish to express our thanks and appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

In addition to the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and those to be delivered by Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and by Tunisia on behalf of the Arab Group, my delegation wishes to focus its statement on the serious circumstances and the grave results of the increased pace of Israeli actions in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in East Jerusalem, and the obstacles it continues to place in the road to peace negotiations, as the entire international community has agreed on.

We wish to stress that it is important to maintain the momentum that resulted following the resumption of direct talks in Washington, D. C. on 2 September 2010 under the auspices of the United States of America, when the Palestinian side, backed by undivided Arab support, stated its readiness to continue along the path towards peace and stability, as reflected in the American and other international parties' efforts. We wish to express our appreciation to President Obama for his efforts to relaunch a genuine peace process, including the commitments that he mentioned in his statement before the General Assembly on 23 September 2010 with regard to the rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of an independent State within a set timeframe (see A/65/PV.11). We also take this opportunity to express our wish that the American Administration continue its robust efforts, pursuant to the established principles of the peace process, resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

Alongside those American and international efforts, the Palestinian leadership has fulfilled all its international commitments under the Road Map. Moreover, it has also taken concrete steps towards establishing the foundations of an independent Palestinian State, for which the Palestinian people yearn, with the support of the international community.

In contrast to that firm Palestinian determination, Israel has continued its unilateral measures by implementing an expedited settlement policy in order to curtail all signs of Palestinian presence on their own land and to undermine the two-State solution, which Israel has repeatedly avowed and committed itself to. Israel is thus fully responsible for stalling the peace process. In the short period since the cessation of direct negotiations, the Israeli Government has continued to seize more land, to build more housing units and to demolish more Palestinian homes and expel its legitimate owners, all the while enacting new legislation limiting the conditions for its withdrawal from East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan.

With regard to the occupied city of Jerusalem and its environs, Israel continues its illegal policy of Judaizing the Holy City through the destruction of its main original features and the recent demolition of a

historic hotel in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem in order to build 20 housing units in the centre of the city. Israel also declared that it will build 1,400 additional housing units for settlers in the southern part of Jerusalem. This will entail the expulsion of Palestinian owners, the demolition of their homes and the cancelling of their residency rights, in clear violation of international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions. That is in addition to provocative measures targeting religious sites and aimed at inflaming religious sensitivities.

The Kingdom of Morocco and His Majesty King Mohammed VI, who is the current Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, set up by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), express their grave concern and condemn all Israeli practices seeking to change the legal status of Jerusalem. The international community and the Security Council are requested to put an end to such practices. The Palestinian side, supported by the League of Arab States, the OIC, the Non-Aligned Movement and other States, opted to come to the Security Council on the matter of Israeli settlements to affirm the illegality of settlement activities and to urge the Council to shoulder its responsibility so as to restore hope in those who chose peaceful negotiations as a civil means to achieve peace. That initiative was based on the belief that peace in the Middle East is not only the concern of the opposing parties and the region itself, but is also a legitimate and immediate requirement of the international community, as the stability of the Middle East has a strong and direct impact on international peace and security.

We wish to send the message that the settlements and the construction of new housing units are rejected and that they impede direct negotiations and undermine all substantive efforts for peace. Based on our resolute choice for peace and our international legitimacy, we wish to reiterate that the two-State solution, which guarantees the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, as well as Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the remaining Lebanese lands, remain the only way to end decades of conflict in the Middle East.

In order to reach that ultimate strategic goal, all efforts to continue direct negotiations and to put an end to all unilateral measures by any side should be strengthened in order to create an environment conducive to relaunching negotiations and to avoid extremism and violence and their dire consequences for all the peoples and States of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Ali (Malaysia): Let me first and foremost congratulate you, Madam President, on your presidency of the Council, and secondly, state that we align my delegation's statement with the statements of the representatives of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Tajikistan, on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The continued occupation of Palestinian territory and its ramifications are unacceptable. The build-up of illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands, including in East Jerusalem, continues unabated. That includes the recent demolition of the historic Shepherd Hotel in order to make way for the construction of more housing for settlers.

In continuing to do so, Israel has time and again put itself on the wrong side of history, with impunity. In that connection, we welcome the European Union's declaration on the Middle East peace process of 13 December 2010, which considers Israeli settlements, including in East Jerusalem, illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. In addition, we also welcome the increasing number of countries officially recognizing the State of Palestine. At the very least, that development serves as an indication to all Palestinians that the world at large has not forgotten or forsaken them.

It is also a reminder to Israel that it must fulfil its legal obligations by stopping all illegal settlement activities, the construction of the separation wall and the demolition of Palestinian-owned buildings and infrastructure, particularly in East Jerusalem. Only by doing so can the peace process timeline stipulated in September 2010 be adhered to and the occupation end. Only by doing so can we bring stability and peace to the Middle East. Most important of all, we can restore justice and all rights due to the Palestinian people.

On Gaza, we reiterate our call on Israel to lift the blockade and end the imprisonment of more than 1.5 million people, to normalize the flow of construction materials and to expedite further approvals of United Nations projects, including the building of more schools by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near

East. Provocative actions, such as the shooting of Palestinian civilians, including children, by Israeli military personnel, must stop, as such actions further aggravate the already dire situation in the Strip.

Resolving these issues requires the international community to focus all its energy and efforts on achieving a comprehensive peace in the region and on restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State of Palestine. All parties must act truthfully and sincerely towards achieving these objectives. We again urge the Security Council to take the necessary action by bringing into effect its very own resolutions on Palestine and the Middle East.

The President: I give the floor to the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin, Madame, by congratulating you, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, on the outstanding manner in which the Bosnian presidency has led the Council's work this month. I also wish to commend Ambassador Susan Rice, Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, who presided so effectively over the Council's work in December 2010.

I also thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his exhaustive briefing, in which he urged the parties and the international community to pursue their efforts aimed at the resumption of negotiations on all final status issues concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In a statement issued earlier this week, the Bureau of my Committee reaffirmed that the continuation of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is the main obstacle to a resumption of negotiations between the parties to the conflict. It again urges the Government of Israel to heed the repeated calls of the international community for a complete cessation of settlement activities, which are illegal under international law and run counter to the efforts to launch successful final status negotiations.

Since the expiration of the partial moratorium in September, Israel has built over 1,600 housing units in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The recent decision of the Government of Israel to devote over $500 million in the form of subsidies to expanding settlements through 2012 also demonstrates Israel's intention to pursue its illegal settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It would be useful if the Security Council were to reaffirm today its firm position on settlements and to demand that an end be put to their expansion so that the parties might understand that the United Nations and the Security Council intend to ensure respect for international legitimacy and to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. The Council must urgently intervene to prevent the situation from deteriorating. It is also obligated to maintain regional peace and security.

In that respect, the Committee fervently hopes that the draft resolution on Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories will be adopted by the Council. Furthermore, the Committee asks the Government of Israel to extend the moratorium indefinitely and to apply it to East Jerusalem, pursuant to its obligations under Road Map. The Committee believes that the implementation of a new moratorium on settlements, including in East Jerusalem, would enable the parties to relaunch serious and direct negotiations. These important negotiations can succeed only in an atmosphere of mutual trust and good faith.

While commending the efforts undertaken by the Quartet and each of its members in recent years to promote a freeze of settlement activities and a resumption of negotiations, the Committee, through me, urges the Council, the Quartet and the high contracting parties to the Geneva Conventions to clearly reaffirm their principled position on the issue of settlements in order to compel Israel to meet its obligations. The very future of the peace process is at stake. The international community should send a clear message that settlement activities are illegal and incompatible with peace. They must therefore stop.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Tajikistan.

Mr. Aslov (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): I have the great honour to make this statement on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) group.

At the outset, I wish to thank you, Madame, for having convened this meeting to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I should also like to convey my gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his very detailed briefing.

Israel, the occupying Power, has methodically stepped up its violations in the occupied Palestinian territories by confiscating lands, demolishing houses, building illegal settlements, constructing the separation wall, erecting numerous checkpoints, detaining thousands of Palestinians and imposing an unjust blockade on the Gaza. All those illegal acts are being undertaken despite unprecedented international unanimity in calling on Israel to stop such unlawful and unilateral activities, which flagrantly violate The Hague and Geneva Conventions, and the resolutions of the Security Council and UNESCO on East Jerusalem, and defy the united international opinion.

East Jerusalem remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967. Its illegal annexation by Israel has been rejected and remains unrecognized by the international community. However, Israel, the occupying Power, pursues a systematic process of altering the historical Arab-Islamic identity of the holy city, Judaizing and tampering with its history, and changing its demographic composition. It continues to build the separation wall, confiscate lands, demolish houses, construct new settlement neighbourhoods, and excavate beneath the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. All these activities seek to completely change the facts on the ground, and ultimately to isolate occupied East Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings.

Settlement construction, if allowed to continue, will make Jerusalem the capital of hatred, fanaticism and violence instead of the capital of tolerance and coexistence. The choice before Israel, the occupying Power, is clear. If peace and international justice are to prevail, the demolition and colonial settlement policies must stop. In the meanwhile, we reaffirm through this international platform that such illegal Israeli practices will surely undermine diplomatic efforts to restore constructive negotiations, and ultimately squander the historic opportunity to make peace and coexistence a reality. At this critical juncture, the international community must shoulder its responsibilities and put a decisive end to the Israeli policy of settlement-building on Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem. Israel must comply with the will of the international community, abide by the resolutions of international legitimacy and respect the provisions of international law. For all these reasons, Israel must stop building and expanding illegal settlements in order to enhance the prospects for a viable two-State solution.

The OIC remains deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty in breach of resolution 1701 (2006), and calls on it to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied territories.

The OIC also associates itself with the position of the international community to the effect that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structures, as well as Israel's measures to impose its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no international legal effect. The OIC demands that Israel abide fully and immediately by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, Acting Head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Serrano: I thank you, Madame, for giving the floor to the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland and Montenegro; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

The European Union listened carefully to the important statements by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

The European Union notes with regret that since our last discussion on the situation in the Middle East in October 2010 (see S/PV.6404), the direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians have come to a stop for the moment. Our hopes for the resumption of direct peace talks, expressed in this very place four months ago, did not materialize.

There is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution. Therefore, the European Union calls on all parties to find a satisfactory way to engage without delay in substantive negotiations on all final status issues. The European Union affirms its readiness to contribute to a negotiated solution on all final status issues within the 12 months set by the Quartet. The European Union is preparing to participate actively in the envisaged Quartet meeting in the coming weeks. Intensified coordination within the Quartet, as well as close cooperation with Arab partners, building on the Arab Peace Initiative, will be instrumental.

In this context, the European Union considers that it is indispensable that both sides show restraint and refrain from actions that could negatively affect the continuation of this process. To that end, both sides must uphold and implement previous commitments and strive to create an environment conducive to a successful outcome of these negotiations.

The European Union reiterates its call on Israel to end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem. As stated by EU ministers in December 2010, settlements are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. If there is to be a genuine peace, a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. In this context, the EU strongly condemns the latest developments in East Jerusalem, most recently the demolition of the Shepherd Hotel on 9 January and the planned construction of a new illegal settlement. These construction plans should be abandoned.

The European Union High Representative, Catherine Ashton, visited the region once more in the first days of 2011. She has listened carefully to the positions and concerns of both parties and underlined the need for urgent progress towards a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security as part of a just and comprehensive peace. She discussed with the Palestinian Authority the implementation of its State-building plan. This work is of crucial importance for the establishment of the future State of Palestine, and the EU will continue to actively support it. We welcome the World Bank's assessment that:

> "If the Palestinian Authority maintains its current performance in institution-building and delivery of public services, it is well-positioned for the establishment of a State at any point in the near future."

Political and financial support from the entire international community is essential. The European Union urges those who have made financial commitments to deliver on their promises. All efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas must also be accelerated.

The European Union remains extremely concerned by the prevailing situation in Gaza and firmly reiterates its calls for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), as well as for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, including goods and persons from the West Bank. The EU recognizes the progress following the decision of the Israeli Government of 20 June 2010, but changes on the ground have been limited and insufficient thus far. Further efforts and complementary measures by the Government of Israel are needed to achieve a fundamental change of policy that will allow for the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza and improve the daily lives of the population while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. The European Union has always recognized these concerns, deeply regrets the loss of life and calls for a complete stop of all violence, including rocket attacks, and of arms smuggling into Gaza. The European Union renews its calls on those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, in contradiction with all principles of international humanitarian law, to release him without delay.

The European Union welcomes the announcement by the Government of Israel concerning new measures to facilitate exports out of Gaza, an essential component of its recovery. The European Union encourages a swift implementation and is ready to work with Israel and the Palestinian Authority towards reaching pre-2007 levels of exports in 2011 to achieve real change on the ground. Increased and accelerated imports of construction materials are another crucial component of Gaza's recovery.

The European Union highly values the services delivered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide health, education and social protection services.

It also recalls that peace in the Middle East should be comprehensive and reiterates the importance of negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. As regards Lebanon, the European

Union has appreciated the Syrian-Saudi efforts to help Lebanon avoid tensions. The European Union reiterates its support for the Lebanese authorities and calls on all political actors to work constructively to seek a negotiated solution to the current situation. Dialogue and stability are essential to responding to recent events in the interest of the Lebanese people.

At the same time, the EU renews its support to the Secretary-General's recent unequivocal statement reaffirming the independence of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, as well as his appeal for calm. The European Union urges all parties not to interfere in the Tribunal's work and not to prejudge its outcome. The European Union takes note that the Prosecutor filed, on Monday, 17 January, an indictment with the Registrar for transmission to the Pre-Trial Judge.

The European Union reaffirms its full support to the Lebanese authorities and commends the crucial role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon. It calls upon all parties concerned to implement all provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), to respect the Blue Line in its entirety, to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL, and to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

Finally, the European Union would like to underline the fundamental importance of respecting and ensuring the promotion and defence of human rights. Human rights are universal and indivisible. They are a key prerequisite for peace and security. Violations of human rights need to be effectively remedied. Human rights, as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and core international human rights treaties, include the responsibility of Governments to protect minorities and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Everyone has the freedom to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Therefore, in the context of recent violent incidents in the region, the European Union reaffirms its condemnation of all forms of intolerance and violence against persons, including on the basis of their religion or belief, wherever they take place.

When it comes to peace between Israelis and Palestinians, these vital elements of the future — State-building, strong economic development, respect for human rights and security — need to be nurtured, but nurtured in the context of resumed serious negotiations on all final status issues, which should lead to a two-State solution. Regional security is at stake. By ending the conflict, both parties, as well as the entire region and beyond, have much to gain. The European Union reiterates its readiness to contribute substantially to a comprehensive and sustainable solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Cabactulan (Philippines): First of all, I should like to congratulate you, Madam President, your country and your delegation for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I also wish to express my appreciation to you and the other members of the Security Council for this opportunity to address this Chamber on a matter that is of grave importance to us all — the peace, security and stability of the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his useful briefing, which set the tone for today's open debate.

At the outset, the Philippines associates itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, but at the same time it wishes to stress certain points.

The timing of the Security Council's open debate today is indeed apt and well chosen. As we enter the new year, with renewed hope and resolve to work harder to attain international peace and security, there is no better choice than to start by discussing the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine, inasmuch as it is one of the most sensitive and long-running issues on the agenda of the United Nations. Since it has become a permanent fixture of the United Nations agenda, however, there is a danger that we sometimes deal with the issue in a ritualistic and mechanical manner, thereby losing the urgency and relevance that it truly deserves. Despite years of debate and the substantial energy and resources spent, the resolution of this problem still remains elusive. I think it is time to change gear, and give peace and security in that region a chance.

In our highly interdependent and networked world, geographical distance and remoteness no longer isolate countries and regions from developments in

others. The Middle East is a major source of oil and a big market for the exports and services of many countries, including the Philippines, and its stability and progress are essential for world peace and security. More than 2 million of my countrymen and women live and work in the Middle East. That is why the Philippine Government has an additional reason for attaching the utmost importance for peace and security to prevail in that troubled land.

The Road Map to peace between Israel and Palestine has so far been hampered by obstacles and difficulties. Time and patience seem to be running out. If this issue is not addressed, it could unfortunately lead again to greater tension, hostility and, worse, armed conflict. This impatience is reflected by the growing view that if Israel and Palestine cannot come to terms, then the outside world or other forces that may come into play have no choice but to impose peace on them. But we know all too well, and history teaches us, that durable and long-lasting peace must come from within and not from without.

The Philippines shares with the Palestinian people their legitimate aspirations to achieve justice, peace and freedom. For many years, the Philippines has joined in the global clamour for the establishment of a Palestinian homeland to help alleviate the dire situation of the Palestinian people. In that regard, similar to other like-minded States, the Philippines considers the two-State solution to be an effective answer to the peace problem. The Philippines has also repeatedly expressed its support for the complete and unconditional lifting of the blockade imposed by the State of Israel on the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza. The embargo is counterproductive, and it serves only to collectively punish the hapless civilians, particularly women and children, in Gaza.

As the international community anxiously awaits any breakthroughs in the peace talks between Israel and Palestine, I wish to point out one important building block, or a direction, of the foundation for long-lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. I am referring to the goal of making the region free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

One of the tangible achievements of the successful 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) regarded how to make progress on the 1995 Review Conference resolution on the Middle East, which called for the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. The Philippines views the road to the establishment of this nuclear-free zone as a critically important confidence-building measure. We are convinced that the process can coexist with the ongoing peace process or initiatives, including those being undertaken by the Quartet for the region.

The Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference (NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol.I)) states:

> "The Conference reaffirms its endorsement of the aims and objectives of the Middle East peace process, and recognizes that efforts in this regard, as well as other efforts, contribute to, inter alia, a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons as well as other weapons of mass destruction." (*Part I, Conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions, section IV, para. 2)*

In that regard, I wish to highlight key points agreed to at the 2010 NPT Review Conference with regard to the 1995 resolution on the Middle East.

First is the convening by the United Nations Secretary-General and the sponsors of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, in consultation with the States of the region, of a conference in 2012, to be attended by all States of the Middle East, on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.

Second is the appointment by the United Nations Secretary-General and the sponsors of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, in consultation with the States of the region, of a facilitator with a mandate to support the implementation of the 1995 resolution by conducting consultations with the States of the region in that regard and undertaking preparations for the 2012 conference.

Third is the designation by the United Nations Secretary-General and the sponsors of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, in consultation with the States of the region, of a host Government for the 2012 Conference.

Time is ticking away and 2012 is just around the corner. The Philippines therefore urges the Secretary-General and the three depository States to carry out the tasks that have been assigned to them by the 2010 NPT Review Conference with haste, while at the same time taking the utmost care to ensure that these tasks are

done well and, of course, in consultation the countries of the region, as stated in the consensus Document.

The 2012 conference presents a rare chance to show the seriousness and goodwill of stakeholders. In essence, all concerned countries must be well prepared to make peace or to give a chance for peace in that region. The conference is a fresh start for all. Once again, I urge all concerned Member States to seize this rare opportunity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I wish to congratulate the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council for this month. As this is the first time I have addressed the Council since the new year, I would also like to congratulate the new non-permanent members of the Security Council, namely, Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa, and wish them great success.

The question of Palestine is undoubtedly the greatest problem facing humankind since the Second World War. The occupation of Palestine, in terms of both its root causes and its consequences, is the greatest and most painful tragedy that has afflicted humankind in modern history.

More than six decades of massacre, home demolitions, food and medicine embargos, abduction and imprisonment; the threatening of its neighbours in various ways, including with nuclear weapons; the waging of numerous wars against Palestine and Lebanon; the assassination of people, political and religious figures and elites; overt and covert interference in the political, economic and cultural affairs of other States; violations of international law and international humanitarian law and all-out violations of human rights, including the killing of children and women — all of this should be reason enough for the international community to take decisive measures to stop these brutalities and grant the people of Palestine the legitimate rights of which they have been deprived for decades.

Despite strong international condemnation, illegal settlements are expanding much faster than ever and an ever greater number of Palestinian homes, including historical sites, are being demolished. The orchestrated construction work is undoubtedly intended to alter the demographic composition and character of the Palestinian territories, particularly in Jerusalem and surrounding areas. It is exactly for this purpose that the Israeli regime has expedited its construction work and is preparing itself for yet another major settlement expansion in occupied East Jerusalem. According to this newly revealed plan, some 1,400 homes will be added to the Gilo settlement near the West Bank town of Bethlehem. This would be the occupying regime's largest known settlement expansion since the plan to add 1,600 homes unveiled last March.

It is very urgent that the international community take this issue more seriously than ever. We therefore welcome the initiative of the League of Arab States, supported by the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Conference, in preparing a draft resolution on the necessity to cease all settlement activities by the Zionist regime. Regarding this draft, we would like to state that we wholeheartedly support the spirit within which it has been presented, aiming at securing the rights of the Palestinian people and preventing the aggression and brutality of the occupying force against the people of Palestine, particularly at this crucial moment.

Of course, the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the draft resolution is without prejudice to its principled position of not recognizing, implicitly or explicitly, the legitimacy of the Israeli regime. Our position is clear: while the Islamic Republic of Iran stands together with all other nations and States that support the people of Palestine and calls on all others to support a final solution to end this great historic tragedy, it believes that the only solution for Palestine is the holding of a general referendum with the participation of all Palestinians regardless of religion or where they live in order to determine the system of Government they wish to have.

Today we need to act collectively to demonstrate our unqualified support to the cause of the Palestinians, and to rally to the aid of those who have been deprived of their rights.

Allow me to take this opportunity to say a few words on developments in Lebanon and the issue of the indictment by the so-called Special International Tribunal on the assassination of the former Lebanese premier, the late Rafiq Hariri. We believe that using political pressure to issue a totally politically motivated verdict in the name of justice not only discredits the

international judicial system, but would also create an unhealthy situation with ramifications for peace and stability in the region. We strongly believe that we should let regional initiatives, along with internal political mechanisms in Lebanon, seek and attain a solution to this issue, without the intervention of any other major Powers.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): The year 2011 will clearly be a critical crossroads in the Middle East peace process. By August, Prime Minister Fayyad's Government is set to complete its two-year plan for Palestinian State-building. The agreed timeframe of the currently stalled Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will also come to an end. In other words, the time to seize the opportunity is now. Failing to do so will not merely result in yet another lost opportunity; the very prospect of a negotiated two-State solution is at stake. That is why we must all stand firm behind the stated goal of negotiating a framework agreement on permanent status and a subsequent comprehensive peace treaty, within the agreed timeline.

This was a main message voiced by the Foreign Minister of Norway during his visit to the region this month. As Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), Minister Støre also expressed his confidence that the international donor community will do its share to make this happen. At the AHLC meeting here in New York last September, we were greatly encouraged by the World Bank conclusion that the Palestinian Authority stands ready to establish a State in the near future. We have no doubt that, at the upcoming AHLC meeting in April, to be convened by Norway and hosted by the European Union in Brussels, major donors will recommit to help the Fayyad Government bring the State-building project to completion by the August deadline.

However, by September 2011, we will need to see a substantial breakthrough on the political track. The bottom-up approach to Palestinian State-building is in itself not sufficient. Questions will arise in earnest concerning its sustainability beyond 2011 if a decisive top-down push is not brought to bear.

If the Palestinian State-to-be is to break out of structural donor dependence, it will need political and economic conditions to do so. Restricted access to resources and markets in Area C and East Jerusalem, as well as to foreign markets, is a major barrier to economic growth in the private sector. This potential must be tapped to fuel the drive towards independence.

The peace process is in a fragile state. Norway is deeply concerned, and so we call on the parties to urgently return to negotiations in good faith. Both sides know perfectly well what they have to do and what they must not do to create an environment conducive to negotiations. For one, maintaining security for all is a key factor for the parties to build confidence and trust in each other as partners in peace. Moreover, it is imperative to refrain from actions that are illegal under international law and that are gradually eroding the ground on which the two-State solution is to be built. In that respect, we take note of the Security Council's draft resolution on Israeli settlements submitted yesterday.

Current policies in the occupied Palestinian territory are simply not sustainable, and time is running out. If international donors lose sight of the two-State solution, it will no longer be possible to take their tireless support for granted. Two decades after the Madrid peace conference, a real sense of urgency is overdue, and decisive action should not be too much to ask for. Not only should the parties return to the table; they must act rapidly to rescue the two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. AlNafisee (Saudi Arabia)(*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Council and the Secretary-General for their efforts to achieve international peace and security in the face of changing circumstances and threats throughout the world at this critical stage. I would also like to thank Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe for his detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

The suffering of the Palestinian people began at the same time as the idea of giving land to a landless people. In that context, the first issue was land and the refugees became the second. Later issues involved settlements, the revision of history and the demolition of religious sites. The Palestinian people paid the price for each of these scourges due to the international community's complete failure to enforce resolutions of international legitimacy against the occupier.

If the United Nations, represented by the Security Council, had fulfilled its role, the Palestinian people would not have had to endure this continued suffering. For more than half a century, Israel has unleashed its worst policies against the people of Palestine, including murder, deportation, imprisonment, blockades, the annexation of land, the confiscation of property, and the looting and plundering of the resources of Palestine. These actions of the Israeli occupation forces seek to perpetuate the destruction of the Palestinian people and its infrastructure, subject it to greater oppression and suffering, and systematically drive the Palestinians to despair and frustration.

The Arabs have chosen peace, not surrender. Their demand was and continues to be for the enforcement of international legitimacy, starting with the implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land in exchange for a just and comprehensive peace. This necessarily requires full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories to the 1967 borders and the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes with full restoration of their rights. That will enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their independent State on their national soil with East Jerusalem as its capital. It will also require Israel's withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights and the Lebanese Shaba'a farms.

To address Israeli violations of international legitimacy is to address violations of international law and the international community's lack of will to shoulder its responsibilities for maintaining peace and security. The Israeli occupation forces have exceeded the limits of international legitimacy in their application of any number of policies, including building the apartheid wall, building and expanding settlements in the occupied territories, and increasing illegal colonization measures.

In addition, the Israeli Government's financing, protecting and arming of settlers has enabled the building of more settlements and resulted in rapid growth over the past few months. Last year, the world witnessed the Israeli project to build 900 housing units in the Gilo settlement, south of occupied Jerusalem. This action was criticized by the entire international community, including the so-called friends of Israel.

Moreover, Israel recently decided through its so-called Israeli Building Management Committee to launch a larger project to build 1,400 housing units in the same settlement under the name Gilo: Southern Slopes. Reports indicate that an even larger project includes a vast plan for 4,000 housing units to attract families from other areas. Such continued expansion, along with the indiscriminate demolition of houses in the occupied Palestinian territories — most recently of the historic Shepherd Hotel — would create obstacles to any peace initiative, as the wall and settlements surrounding most cities of the West Bank will make it nearly impossible to establish a contiguous, viable Palestinian State in the future.

Israel's illegal measures and practices against the Palestinian people not only constitute violations of the United Nations Charter, humanitarian law and resolutions of international legitimacy; they also undermine any slim chance for peace. Furthermore, such unilateral practices prevent any international initiative or effort to achieve peace and undermine any international drive to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for its actions. From this rostrum my Government calls on the international community, the United Nations and the Quartet in particular to adopt a comprehensive, strategic approach to achieving the immediate and complete cessation of all settlement activities in the occupied territories.

For the past six decades, the Arab-Israeli conflict has dominated all issues in the Middle East. This has led in turn to extremism and the expansion of terrorism and created a critical deterrent to development and reform efforts in the region, which should play a civilized role instead of being torn by conflicts that sap its energy and squander its resources.

In conclusion, all the Arab countries have stressed their continued commitment to a just and comprehensive peace based on international legitimacy. In return, these countries continue to await a matching, serious Israeli commitment. In this context, the Israeli side must immediately accept the Arab Peace Initiative, which is the only way to achieve a lasting and comprehensive peace between the two sides and a definitive solution that is equitable for all parties.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jomaa (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my great honour and privilege to address the Security Council on behalf of the Arab Group on the situation in

the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would like to begin by congratulating the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on its assumption of the Council presidency this month and to wish it every possible success. My gratitude goes also to Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing to the Council.

The situation in the Middle East is entering a new and decisive phase that requires that each of us take a firm position. A prompt and serious international commitment is necessary to end Israel's occupation policies, which continue to exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people and cause escalating tensions and provocations. That, unfortunately, impedes the resumption of the peace process. This is a very serious phase, which the international community must address with a great deal of responsibility and caution in order to avoid any exacerbation of tension in the situation and prevent any risk of explosion.

The situation on the ground is extremely alarming. The Arab Group would like to reaffirm very clearly that Israel's obstinacy in implementing its settlement policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, constitute ongoing violations of international law and relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. These practices undermine the possibility of achieving peace and the creation of a sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Arab Group also reaffirms Israel's sole and full responsibility for the failure of the negotiation process launched in Washington, D.C., in September as a result of its preference for colonial settlement activities over peace. Israel's behaviour is a brazen challenge to international unanimity in asserting the illegality of the settlements and the very serious impact of the pursuit of these activities on the possibility of reaching peace and a two-State solution. Everyone here will remember that the Arab States have addressed the peace process in a very positive and responsible way. They afforded international efforts undertaken by many parties every possible chance to ensure that this process would advance in the hope of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that would guarantee a two-State solution within pre-1967 borders.

The Arab Peace Initiative commission has met several times over the past few months and adopted many decisions to stay the Initiative's course while absolutely rejecting Israel's continued colonial settlement activities and arbitrary practices. Israel's pursuit of its policy of provocation, its settlement activity and practices, and collective punishment aimed at the Palestinian people, as well as the inhumane blockade imposed on nearly 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, have led to an impasse and undermined all prospects for the peace process. In the meantime, unfortunately, these practices proliferate and get worse.

All of that is alarming, and leads us to ask ourselves whether Israel, the occupying Power, is truly serious about achieving peace in the region. It is very important that we remind all the members of the Council and all States Members of the United Nations of the reality of some of these serious practices, which must stop immediately if we want to see the peace process relaunched and stability reign in the region. Let us recall that these policies include the continued practice of violence and terror against Palestinian civilians by Israeli settlers seeking to annex more Palestinian land and maintain the status quo; the ongoing assassinations of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli occupation forces in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; the continuing illegal inhuman blockade of the Gaza Strip; the increase in military actions against civilians in the Gaza Strip, which have claimed the lives of many individuals; increased expulsions; the destruction of homes; and the withdrawal of Palestinians' rights of residency. These actions are in flagrant violation of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Additional illegal practices include changing the demographic composition and legal status of Jerusalem by expelling Palestinian inhabitants; the destruction of the historic Shepherd Hotel in East Jerusalem under a plan to construct a new settlement of 20 housing units, which threatens the geographic contiguity of the Palestinian territories and the viability of any future Palestinian State; the recent adoption by the municipal Government of Jerusalem of a plan to build 124 new housing units around East Jerusalem; and the recent announcement by the Jerusalem planning commission of a new plan providing for the construction of a further 1,400 housing units for Jewish settlers in annexed land in the occupied West Bank.

The Arab Group, while welcoming the rejection of such practices by the international community, calls for the implementation of real measures on the ground

and calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to put an immediate end to these practices and to fulfil its commitments within the framework of international law, international humanitarian law and its commitments to the Road Map and the various benchmarks of the peace process.

Unfortunately, the repeated calls of the Secretary-General and his condemnation of the continued occupation, as well as the appeals of the Quartet, the international community and the European Union, have not been met with any response from the Israeli occupying forces, which have continued their repressive practices in flagrant violation of the desire of the international community to help the Palestinian people, which has struggled under colonialist occupation for decades, to enjoy its right to freedom and independence. Accordingly, the Arab Group condemns these practices and calls on all influential parties, including the Quartet, to assume their responsibilities, address these issues, face down Israel's obstinate refusal to accept international legitimacy, and force it to accept efforts to build a just peace.

We also call on the Quartet to go beyond the mere adoption of statements and reiteration of positions. What is important now is to ensure that these positions are implemented on the ground by exerting the necessary pressure on the occupying forces. We cherish the hope that this will indeed take place following the Quartet meeting to be held in Munich on 5 February.

We also condemn the ongoing inhumane blockade imposed on Gaza and ask the international community to take every possible step to put an immediate end to this unjust blockade, lift all restrictions to freedom of movement, enable access of humanitarian assistance, and cooperate in a more serious and effective way with the efforts of the United Nations agencies to rebuild the Gaza Strip and enable its inhabitants to enjoy their basic rights to life, housing, education and health.

The Arab Group reaffirms its absolute rejection of any activity aimed at changing the demographic, religious and social composition of the holy city of Jerusalem, of any attack on holy sites, and of any attempt at arbitrary destruction of homes or expulsion of people. We condemn these continued practices and ask the international community to take a firm position to ensure that an end is put to them and prevent the maintenance of the status quo.

Regarding the situation in the Middle East with specific reference to the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, the Arab Group affirms the Arab position that a just and lasting peace with Israel can be achieved only through Israel's full withdrawal from occupied Arab territories to the lines of 4 June 1967, including East Jerusalem, the occupied Syrian Golan and the territories that are still occupied in the south of Lebanon. It is necessary that an independent Palestinian State be established, with East Jerusalem as its capital, pursuant to the Arab Peace Initiative; to ensure a just return of the Palestinian refugees; and to implement all relevant United Nations resolutions.

Allow me to remind the Council that the ongoing violations of Lebanese airspace by Israel's forces and the violations of its commitments under resolution 1701 (2006) are all fraught with the threat of the return of tension to the region and the undermining of efforts to maintain stability.

The Arab Group calls for an end to these violations and to settlement in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and reaffirms that all activities undertaken by Israel in the Golan aimed at changing its demographic and legal status, as well as Israeli measures aimed at exerting administrative authority there, are null and void and have no legal basis. The Arab Group calls for immediate withdrawal by Israel from the Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, as well as for the implementation of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

The international community cannot stand by passively in the face of the occupying Power's continued violations of every one of its commitments under international law, instruments and agreements. The enormous suffering of the peoples of the region has lasted far too long. There is no alternative to ending the occupation of Arab territories in order to ensure security and stability in a region to which, as everyone knows, the security and stability of the entire world are related.

The international community cannot permit any increase in tensions and frustration or the resumption of aggression against the lives of civilians. This is an immediate danger, and urgent and firm measures must be taken to address the underlying causes of the tension. The Secretary-General has reaffirmed in his recent statements and briefings on the Middle East that the need is urgent and that the strategy for addressing

this situation must be changed. We must therefore overcome the shortcomings and answer the repeated calls on the international community to preserve the rights of Palestinian civilians and protect them from such oppressive practices so as to ensure that the peace process has the chance to resume.

The Arab Group supports the resumption of the peace process, but its position is clear. Relaunching Israeli-Palestinian negotiations requires an immediate halt to all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The established benchmarks of the peace process must be honoured. An end to settlement activity is not the only condition required for the peace process to resume. International and humanitarian law must also be implemented. Continued settlement activities undermine the very nature of negotiations. Historic Palestinian territories are, unfortunately, are shrinking and being drained of their life.

In this context, a draft resolution on the occupied Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem has been introduced, calling for an immediate end to settlement activity, which would enable resumed negotiations to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region. The draft resolution enjoys the support of the Arab ministerial meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh and of the majority of States Members of our Organization. It is sponsored by more than 120 States, which shows clearly that the international community is unanimous in confronting the imminent threat presented by these ongoing practices, which are condemned by all under international law, instruments and agreements.

The draft resolution contains consensus wording and is based on previous Security Council resolutions, as well as on a number of resolutions and statements made by relevant actors and parties. It recalls the basic positions regarding settlement activity and articulates a position aimed at preserving the peace process's chances of success and at fulfilling the aspirations of the peoples of the region, and of the international will as a whole, with respect to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to freedom and dignity and to build an independent State on its territory.

The members of the Arab Group support the draft resolution in a demonstration of their commitment to international legitimacy and their desire to abide by their obligations as members of the international community responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. The draft resolution is an opportunity to breathe new life into the peace negotiations and, indeed, to save them in order to ensure peace. All those who cherish peace are called on to support the draft resolution and to ensure the implementation of justice and righteousness throughout the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation wishes to congratulate the new members of the Security Council: Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa. I would also like to express my thanks to you, Madame President, for organizing this open debate to address the deteriorating situation in the occupied Arab territories under the agenda item, "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". This item is concerned exclusively with the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Palestinian question, and not with any other urgent matter beyond that political or geographical area and outside the item's historic definition, regardless of its possible importance.

In this Chamber and beyond its walls, the unanimous view is that tension in the Middle East is greater than anywhere else in the world. The situation is extremely grave and could well have dramatic consequences for international peace and security. The achievement of a comprehensive and just peace is an urgent matter of relevance to all concerned parties in the region and throughout the world.

But talking of the need for peace is one thing; the ability to act and achieve it is another. While everyone reiterates the importance of achieving a peace to which we all aspire, Israel continues to repudiate it and to defy the entire international community, including Powers that are considered to be its closest friends and allies. This extremely serious situation jeopardizes peace and security in the region, while the Security Council is unable to honour its obligations and commitments or to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter.

The situation reveals Israel's methodical attempt to violate rights that runs counter to the basic tenets of international and international humanitarian law. Israel's aggressive behaviour and unrestrained settlement efforts in occupied Arab territories are

condemned by the international community and violate such international principles and agreements as the Charter of the United Nations and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. They also constitute a violation of hundreds of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In addition to this are the annexation of territory, deportations, evictions and the transfer of settlers to Arab lands. There is also the problem of the racist wall on Palestinian territory and the Judaization of Jerusalem. These racist practices are carried out under the willing gaze of the occupying army and a deafening international silence denoting more than complicity.

As we talk of settlements in the Palestinian territories, it is appropriate for us to remind Council members that Israeli settlements have been an essential element of plans by the leaders of the Zionist movement ever since the partition of Palestine in 1947. The first Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, established this movement, told a Zionist meeting that

> "after we become a strong force, as a result of the creation of a state, we shall abolish partition and expand into the whole of Palestine."

Ben-Gurion said this in 1949. A year later, he wrote to his son:

> "We are going to create an extremely sophisticated defense force, an elite corps. There will be no gainsaying that our army will be one of the best in the world and nobody, my son, will then prevent us from colonizing the whole of Palestine. There is no doubt about it."

Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Defense Minister during the aggression of 1967, who was a witness to the beginning of settlement activity, stated on 4 April 1969 to *Ha aretz*, the Israeli newspaper:

> "We came to this country, which was already populated by Arabs and we are establishing a Hebrew, that is, a Jewish state here. Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist. Not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either. Nahlal arose in the place of Mahlul; Kibbutz Gvat in the place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in the place of Hanifieh; and Kefar Yehushua in the place of Tal al-Shuman. There is not a single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population."

Today's meeting coincides with the second anniversary of the Israeli aggression against Gaza, which cost the lives of over 1,000 people and left thousands of innocent civilians wounded. This was very clearly noted in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48), which unambiguously stated that Israel deliberately targeted civilians. The report described Israeli practices during this attack as war crimes and serious violations of international humanitarian law, which could be deemed crimes against humanity.

The perpetrators of these crimes remain unpunished. This encourages Israel to continue its unfair and inhumane blockade against the population of Gaza, defying the will of the international community, which has called for the lifting of the blockade. Israel did not stop there. Its response to international appeals to lift the blockade was the attack on the freedom flotilla, which was on its way to Gaza on a purely humanitarian mission. Nine peace activists were killed in international waters and dozens wounded.

We recall that the General Assembly recently adopted two resolutions supporting the calls of the Human Rights Commission to the United Nations, the entire United Nations system, including the Security Council, to implement the proposals in the Goldstone report.

The Security Council must therefore bear its responsibilities. It must prosecute the Israeli perpetrators and punish them for the crimes they have committed in Gaza if it wishes to establish justice and to prevent impunity, two objectives of the Organization itself.

The Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan is a part of this bleak picture. Israel still refuses to return the occupied Syrian Golan to its motherland, Syria. It still refuses to accept international resolutions, particularly resolution 497 (1981), which considers the annexation of the Syrian Golan to be null and void. Israel continues to terrorize citizens there.

In provocation, escalation and defiance of the will of the international community, the Knesset recently adopted a law to organize a general referendum before any withdrawal from the occupied

Syrian Golan and occupied East Jerusalem. This is the way in which Israel deals with issues that are not in its purview to address. It represents a flagrant disregard for international law and the position and will of the entire international community regarding the occupied Syrian Golan and East Jerusalem. Israel must implement resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We assert here that this recent Israeli initiative and all others stand totally rejected and do not alter the fact that the Golan is an occupied Syrian territory. It cannot be the subject of negotiations. The return of the Golan in its entirety to the 4 June 1967 border constitutes the basis for peace. Once again, we reiterate that Israel should not consider Syria's demands to be painful concessions. These are lands and rights that have been usurped and that must be returned and restored.

We had hoped to see the Secretary-General and the Council implement their minimum prerogatives regarding resolution 497 (1981) by discussing this provocative Israeli behaviour and taking measures demonstrating their rejection of this serious Israeli action regarding the occupied Syrian Golan. We have made a very detailed presentation to the Security Council regarding this serious violation of international law and legitimacy. It is unacceptable and irrational for us to be asked to bring forward new proof of our desire for peace while Israel continues to occupy our land, to attack our people and to threaten peace and security.

The important question here that demands answers is: How long shall Israel remain above the law? How long shall Israel enjoy impunity as it pursues its policy of aggression? How long shall the Security Council be incapable of taking concrete measures to deal with the horrors perpetuated by Israel in the occupied Arab territories? How long shall the silence regarding Israeli policy, which is pushing the region to an explosion, be maintained?

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria): At the outset, I would like to extend the congratulations of the delegation of Algeria to your friendly country, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to you personally, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I would also like to thank you for organizing this open debate on an important question on the agenda of the international community as a whole.

I would also like to thank the outgoing members of the Security Council — Austria, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and Uganda — which served with dedication in pursuit of peace and security and respect for the rule of law in every situation. I also want to congratulate the incoming members — Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa — on beginning their mandates. I wish them success in fulfilling their responsibilities.

In spite of recent efforts to revitalize the peace process, Israel continues to carry out its illegal settlements and colonization activities in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which are accompanied by escalating settler violence, home demolitions, forced evictions and the ongoing construction of the separation wall despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The recent allocation by the Israeli Government of significant additional financial resources to expand settlements through 2012 demonstrates clearly that Israel is not on the path to peace and that the only goal pursued by Israeli policy seems to be to undermine any future prospects for a peaceful settlement. It is obvious that those measures are intended to annex Palestinian territory by bringing about long-term demographic changes, removing traces of Palestinian heritage and fortifying the Israeli presence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the situation is Gaza remains disturbing from the perspective of human rights and international law. Palestinians continue to be punished collectively through the isolation of the 1.5 million residents of Gaza for several years, including the interdiction of exports from the Strip and the prevention of the flow of goods and people, even in life-and-death situations. Algeria reiterates its demand for Israel's immediate lifting of its illegal blockade and for the opening of all crossing points to Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009), General Assembly resolution ES-10/18 and other relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Similarly, the imprisonment of about 10,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails, where ill-treatment and torture are widely used, represents a matter of serious concern for my country. The international seminar in

support of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails organized in Algiers on 5 December 2010, with the participation of delegations from several countries, called on the international community to address this scandalous challenge to international humanitarian law and to adopt a clear and urgent stand for the immediate release of these illegally detained people, among whom are children and women.

It is the responsibility of the Security Council to exercise its prerogatives in order to halt the brutal practices of the Israeli Government by taking the required actions to ensure respect for, and compliance with, the ruling of the International Court of Justice, the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Negotiations remain imperative for achieving the two-State solution based on resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, including the principle of land for peace, which means the withdrawal of Israel from all Arab occupied territories.

Algeria reiterates that any negotiated outcome between the parties must result in the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. A complete cessation of colonization and settlement activities and human rights violations is clearly a prerequisite to creating a more stable environment conducive to resuming the peace process and achieving the two-State solution for peace.

As a sponsor of the draft resolution contained in document S/2011/24, Algeria urges the 15 members of the Security Council to step up to the challenge at stake and to ensure its timely adoption.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): It is indeed a great privilege to participate in today's meeting with you in the Chair, Madam President. You have a very onerous task, which you are carrying out magnificently.

I would like to congratulate our friends that have just joined the Council, namely, India, Colombia, Germany, Portugal and South Africa, but Portugal specifically. We wish them success in their work in the Council.

I align myself with my Egyptian colleague's statement as head of the Non-Aligned Movement.

A lot has not changed since we were last here, but there is always hope. During the last open debate on the Middle East in the Chamber (see S/PV.6404), many of us urged the Security Council, the Quartet and the international community to act in tandem and prevent the collapse of Israel-Palestine dialogue and direct negotiations. Three months later, we regret to note that all efforts to ensure continuity have failed. The quest for sustainable peace in the Middle East and a permanent political settlement to the Israel-Palestinian question based on the two-State solution appears as elusive as ever. In that context, I share the assessment of many Member States that this impasse is due to Israeli expansionist thoughts, vision and policy, which manifest themselves in the form of the ongoing settlement activities.

This is a clear violation of international law, and should be taken as a major provocation. This month, the very old Shepherd Hotel in Jerusalem was demolished to build 20 new housing units. Was that really necessary? Elsewhere in the West Bank, the altering of the status of centuries-old prayer places, mosques, churches and cemeteries of the Palestinian people goes on unabated in the name of history, excavation and creating — truthfully — new housing space. Each block of those settlements constitutes a major roadblock towards what we can consider to be a final peaceful settlement — if ever. It complicates the peace process and vitiates the atmosphere for talks. Israel must stop building new settlements or using settlement activity as a political tool in the peace process.

I am surprised that, despite the odds, the Palestinians have done well. We hear the name of Salam Fayyad, who has taken important strides towards implementing the plan announced in August 2009 for the building of State institutions within two years. He has done it; I extend my congratulations to Ambassador Mansour.

Many independent studies, including the *Economic Monitoring Report* of the World Bank, have praised this performance and, in my mind, this delivery of public services by the Palestinian Authority shows that the corner has been turned. The Middle East Quartet, despite its own banes, acknowledged these developments in its statement of 21 September 2010.

The policies of self-reliance and empowerment and the creation of economic opportunities pursued by the Palestinian Authority have established a solid edifice for Palestinian statehood and removed all pretexts for the occupation.

The goal of establishing a Palestinian State by August 2011 is well within our grasp. We must not let it slip away; we must not allow peace and stability to fall by the wayside. Failure to meet the Oslo Accord deadlines of 1999 triggered the second intifada. Missing the 2005 deadline for Palestine statehood set in the Quartet Road Map of 2003 precipitated violence and bloodshed. Do we want such calamities to revisit the region?

The Security Council must therefore fulfil its Charter responsibility and the Quartet Road Map, and ensure that the historic opportunity to create a viable Palestinian State by August 2011 is not lost. The Council can do so by calling upon Israel to unconditionally cease all settlement activity and resume direct negotiations at the earliest with the Palestinian Authority on all outstanding issues.

Pakistan is supportive of lasting peace for all the inhabitants of the Middle East, irrespective of their religion, ethnicity or nationality. That is where we stand. The framework for such a peace has been elaborately laid down in resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008); the Madrid terms of reference; the Arab Peace Initiative; and the several Quartet Road Maps. We share the collective objective of the international community for an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in peace with its Israeli neighbours. Our prayer is that today's open debate in the Council will serve to bring us nearer to that objective.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I congratulate you, Madame, on the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I thank the outgoing members of the Council and congratulate to the new members. We will continue to work closely with all members of the Council, of course.

Australia is genuinely committed to peace and security in the Middle East. We support a just and enduring peace based on a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 borders that would allow Israel and a future Palestinian State to live side by side in peace and security. As our Foreign Minister said during the general debate of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session,

> "All States members of the General Assembly should welcome the prospect of both an Israeli and a Palestinian State being represented at the sixty-sixth session of the Assembly, to be held next year" (*A/65/PV.16, p. 41*).

We should all support every serious effort to achieve that.

Australia commends ongoing international efforts to realize peace, including by the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. During his visit last month to the region, including to Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, and Israel, our Foreign Minister, Mr. Rudd, underscored to both parties and to regional leaders that now is the time to seize the opportunity for peace. As he said publicly at the time that time was running out and that what was needed was not just another peace process, but a peace outcome. What is needed is not another Road Map; we need to see the destination to which the road is taking us.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders need to return to direct talks as a matter of urgency. Both sides must refrain from actions that undermine confidence, including — decisively — the construction of settlements. Australia unambiguously opposes new Israeli settlements. They are illegal. They are not only an obstacle to peace — they actively undermine the prospects for achieving peace. They compromise the future of a two-State solution, and they must stop. We agree with the Quartet in its statement of 21 September that Israel's previous moratorium on settlements had a positive and beneficial impact on the environment for negotiations. In our view, a cessation of settlement activity now would unquestionably assist peace efforts.

Australia is serious about its support for a two-State solution. We will continue and increase our support for the practical establishment on the ground of a viable Palestinian State. We have already provided almost $70 million in direct budget support to the Palestinian Authority, and Foreign Minister Rudd announced in Ramallah in December that Australia is now developing a five-year development partnership with the Palestinian Authority that will include regular budget support and the provision of scholarships

focusing on those disciplines critical to institution-building. This multi-year agreement — the starting point for an enhanced development partnership — is the first of its kind by a development partner with the Palestinian Authority and reflects our recognition that an independent, viable Palestinian State requires predictable funding to plan ahead and to budget for the provision of services that any functioning State must be able to provide to its citizens.

We are also increasing our support through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, including our first multi-year commitment, rather than the annual contribution that we have made in the past to the core resources of the Agency.

The situation on the ground in Gaza remains extremely serious. We welcome the relaxation of some Israeli restrictions on access to and from Gaza, and of course we recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns. But we remain very concerned at the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The easing of restrictions already announced must be implemented now, and we urge Israel to lift the remaining restrictions.

Finally, I must note that Australia remains firm in our support for the sovereignty, independence and unity of the Lebanese State and its people. All parties need to play a constructive role and, of course, refrain from any actions that might create instability. We encourage and support the current international efforts to mobilize in support of Lebanon. We call on all parties to cooperate with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, in accordance with resolution 1757 (2007), and to allow it to complete its important work.

To conclude, there can be no doubt that the situation between Israel and Palestine is — as was said by the Permanent Observer of Palestine this morning — at a critical juncture and that the prospects for resuming a credible peace process are quickly fading. As one of the Council members reminded us today, it is 20 years since the current peace process was launched in Madrid. It is, in fact, 65 years since the question of Israel and Palestine has been before the United Nations in one way or another. We very strongly agree with the comment made this morning that this should and must be the last year of the process. All the parties have an historic and indeed human obligation to do more than just recommit to peace and speak the rhetoric of peace. They and all of us in the international community need to act to do all we can to achieve peace now and to move, as another speaker recently said, beyond the rhetoric and the inability to act to produce the ability and determination to act, and then to act.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Osman (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to greet the Council as it meets to address the crucial and vital issue of the situation in the Middle East, which is of great importance to all of us. This is not the first time that the Security Council has addressed the situation in the Middle East and the challenge that it represents to the entire international community. Everyone hopes that our collective efforts to address this challenge will be commensurate with its magnitude.

I take this opportunity to address a substantive and important issue that no one can overlook, as it is the main obstacle to the attainment of peace and the relaunching of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, namely, the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The United Nations has adopted many resolutions calling on Israel to abide by international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, to put an end to the illegal practices that jeopardize the rights of the Palestinian people, and to halt the building and expansion of settlements. The United Nations considers these settlements to be null and void. In this connection, we would like to stress the following points.

First, the international community, including the Member States represented in the Council and unanimous international public opinion, agrees that the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem represent a flagrant violation of international law and the United Nations Charter. It defies the will of the international community and relevant international resolutions, especially resolution 446 (1979), which considered the construction of settlements of no legal value, as it represents a serious obstacle to the attainment of a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

Secondly, the International Court of Justice, in its Advisory Opinion of 2004 on the building of the separation wall, concluded that the wall represents a violation of fundamental human rights.

Thirdly, Israel's ongoing construction and expansion of settlements and its defiance of the will of the international community undermine the negotiation process aimed at achieving a two-State solution on the basis of United Nations resolutions, the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other terms of reference.

Fourthly, the expansion of settlements prevents the resumption of negotiations between the two parties and thus hampers the prospects for peace and a peaceful settlement of the question of the Middle East, the lack of which threatens peace and security in the region.

As it witnesses the expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and the resulting dire consequences following the wide-ranging international rejection of these illegal activities, the Security Council, as the organ entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security, should fully shoulder its responsibilities. It should oblige Israel to freeze and put an end to its settlement activities so as to pave the way for the resumption of negotiations in order to reach a two-State solution, and establish an independent Palestinian State within the borders of 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital.

In conclusion, I would like to state that my country, which is a sponsor and supporter of the draft resolution under consideration, calls upon all the members of the Security Council to adopt it if they truly desire peace and security in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Rahman (Bangladesh): Madame President, let me begin by thanking your country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and you personally for steering this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. My delegation would also like to congratulate all the new members of the Council: Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa. We wish them all the very best in their work in the Council. I also would like to convey our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

I also wish to state that the delegation of Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt and Tajikistan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively. In addition, I wish to briefly make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, has always been of major concern to the international community and the United Nations. A durable and sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of Palestine, which is the core of the long-lasting crisis, must therefore be our collective strategic objective. All Member States should pledge complete commitment to this objective and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization.

Bangladesh is always ready to play a constructive role in this collective endeavour to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the two-State principle. Bangladesh unites with the international community in reaffirming its full support for the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and freedom from continued occupation.

The people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental rights to self-determination and right to live freely in their own land, and displaced Palestinians have been denied their rights to return home and to live in dignity and safety. Unfortunately, this appears to be a collective failure on the part of the international community, and even more so of the people of Israel, who suffer deprivation as they fail to rise to the occasion by guaranteeing the people of Palestine their fundamental right to self-determination and to a sovereign State of their own, side by side with Israel. In order to achieve a lasting solution in the Middle East, it is very important to address the key issue, which is the prolonged and illegal occupation of Arab territories by Israel.

We are disheartened to see that, although Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority pledged in September 2010 to seek a framework agreement on permanent status within a year, that process has suffered a serious setback. This is because, regrettably, Israel did not renew a 10-month settlement moratorium, which did not include East Jerusalem, when it expired at the end of September 2010, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has refused to resume peace talks with Israel until it ends all settlement activity.

My delegation believes that direct negotiations will be successful only if there is sustained regional and international support for the talks, the parallel process of Palestinian State-building and the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive regional peace as envisaged in the Fourth Geneva Convention and in the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Success also requires regional and international support for the principle of land for peace and the Madrid Conference terms of reference, which guarantee Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories back to the line of June 4 1967, and for the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which are the best guides for achieving a two-State solution.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Bangladesh's long-standing position that the continued illegal occupation of Palestine over the past six decades is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. Let me also reiterate our full support for a lasting peace for all inhabitants of the region, both Arabs and Israelis, and our strong commitment for the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in peace with all its neighbours.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.